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(54) SOLID LUBRICANT AND HARDENABLE STEEL COATING SYSTEM

FESTSCHMIERSTOFF UND BESCHICHTUNGSSYSTEM AUS HÄRTBAREM STAHL
SYSTEME DE REVETEMENT EN ACIER RESISTANT, LUBRIFIANT ET DURCISSABLE

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Description

This invention relates to the art of fluid lubricated metal wear interfaces or contacts, and more particularly to the use of anti-friction solid film lubricants for such interfaces modified to withstand high unit scraping or bearing loads at high temperatures while functioning with either full or partial wet lubrication.

The utility of certain solid film lubricants for bearings has been known for some time. U.S. patent 1,654,509 (1927) discloses use of powder graphite trapped or covered by a metal binder (i.e., iron, aluminium, bronze, tin, lead, babbitt, or copper) to form a thick coating; the metal is heated to at least a thermoplastic condition by melting or arc spraying to bury the graphite. The coating offers limited friction reducing characteristics. Unfortunately, (i) the graphite is not exposed except by significant wear of the metal, thus never realising significantly lower friction; (ii) the metal is in a molten condition prior to trapping or burying the graphite, causing thermal effects and distortions; and (iii) oxides of the metal serve as the primary lubricant.

The prior art has also appreciated the advantage of thermally spraying (by oxy-fuel) aluminium bronze as a solid film lubricant onto cylinder bore surfaces of an engine as demonstrated in U.S. patent 5,080,056. The lubricating quality of such patented coating at high temperatures is not satisfactory because (i) it lacks compatibility with piston ring materials which usually comprise cast iron, molybdenum coated cast iron, or electroplated hard chromium; and (ii) thermal spraying of the material by oxy-fuel is not desirable because of very high heat input necessitating elaborate tooling to dissipate rapidly such heat to avoid distortion of the cooled part.

In U.S. patent 3 935 797 it was proposed to apply a powder mixture of iron with at most 0.3% by weight of graphite as discrete particles as a coating to an aluminium alloy piston by plasma spraying, in order to improve the resistance to wear and seizure.

EP-A 0 487 273 discloses a thermal spray powder for the production of abradable seals, e.g. for rotating parts of axial flow gas turbines, comprising an agglomerate of a matrix-forming component (e.g. a metal), a solid lubricant (e.g. a fluoride or boron nitride) and a plastic, which normally remains as part of the coating. Such seals are not otherwise lubricated.

The inventor of the present invention has previously disclosed certain solid lubricants operable at high temperatures, but designed for either interfacing with ceramics, not metals, and generally at low load applications in the absence of any liquids, or with metals in an oilless environment. One solid film lubricant disclosed comprises graphite and boron nitride in a highly viscous thermoplastic polymer binder spread in a generous volume onto a seal support comprised of nickel and chromium alloy. The formulation was designed to provide a hard coating which softens at the surface under the load, while at or above the operating temperature and while

functioning only under dry conditions. Thermoplastic polymer based formulations are unsatisfactory, unless substantially modified, in meeting the needs of a highly loaded engine component, such as a cylinder bore, because the interfacing surfaces are subject to wet lubrication, the unit loads are significantly higher (approaching 3.5 MPa (500 psi)) and the surface temperatures are far higher, causing scraping. Another solid film lubricant disclosed was halide salts or MoS₂ (but not as a combination) in a nickel, copper, or cobalt binder; the coating, without modifications, would not be effective in providing a stable and durable anti-friction coating for the walls of an internal combustion cylinder bore, because the formulations were designed to operate under dry conditions and against ceramics (primarily lithium aluminium silicate and magnesium aluminium silicate), and thus the right matrix was not used, nor was the right combination of solid film lubricants used.

Particularly significant is the fact that formulations were designed to produce a ceramic compatible oxide (e.g., copper oxide or nickel oxide) through partial oxidation of the metal in the formulation. These systems were also designed to also permit as much as 300-500 microns of wear. For cylinder bore lubrication, only 5-10 microns of wear is tolerated.

It is an object of this invention to provide an improved solid lubricant coating system for oil-lubricated light metal or light metal alloy substrates subject to sliding wear at high temperatures, such as the cylinder bores of an internal combustion engine.

Such a coating system, in accordance with the invention, is set forth in claim 1, and can economically reduce friction for high temperature applications, particularly along a cylinder bore wall at temperatures above 315°C (600°F) when oil lubrication fails or in the presence of oil flooding (while successfully resisting conventional or improved piston ring applied loads).

A method according to the invention, as set forth in claim 9, provides a low cost method of making coated cylinder walls by rapidly applying a coating by plasma spraying at reduced or selected areas of the bore wall while achieving excellent adherence and precise deposition, the method demanding less rough and finish machining of the final bore surface.

An aluminium alloy cylinder wall of an engine which is coated with a coating composition embodying the invention has advantages that it (i) assists in achieving reduced piston system friction and reduced piston blow-by, all resulting in an improved vehicle fuel economy of 2-4% for a gasoline powered vehicle; (ii) reduces hydrocarbon emissions; and (iii) reduces engine vibration by at least 20% at wide-open throttle conditions at moderate speeds (i.e. 1000-3000 rpm).

Other features of the invention are the subject of the sub-claims.

In one embodiment of the invention the coating system comprises agglomerates of particles forming grains adhered to a metal substrate or interface, said particles

being comprised of (i) particles of at least two solid lubricant particles selected from the group consisting of graphite, hexagonal boron nitride, molybdenum disulfide, lithium fluoride, calcium fluoride, and eutectic mixtures of LiF/CaF_2 or LiF/NaF ; and (ii) steel particles fused together and bounding said solid lubricant particles at least at certain intersections, certain portions of said steel particles being air-hardened to a high hardness upon exposure of the coating to the interface at high temperatures. It is desirable that the steel particles be of a stainless steel character consisting preferably of 70% iron, 15-24% chromium, and about 8% nickel. The agglomerates preferably comprise by volume: 15-25% solid lubricant particles and 74-84% stainless steel particles. The air-hardened hardness of the steel is about Rc 60, and the coefficient of friction achieved by the coating system is about .14 dry and 0.06-0.08 under partially wet lubricated conditions.

According to the method aspect of this invention anti-friction coated surfaces subject to sliding wear are made by the steps of (a) forming grains of agglomerated particles of at least two oil-attracting solid lubricants selected from the group consisting of graphite, molybdenum disulfide, boron nitride, calcium fluoride, sodium fluoride and lithium fluoride, and of air-hardenable, fusible ingredients such as steel particles, the particles being agglomerated by a low melting, easily combustible, ash-free binder or medium such as wax; (b) providing a light metal-based component surface; (c) thermally spraying such grains onto said surface in a thickness range of 100-250 microns to form a coating substantially devoid of the binder (the temperature of said thermal spraying eliminating the wax by ash-free combustion); (d) removing at least a portion of the fusible particles by honing to expose edges of such particles; and (e) subjecting the exposed particles to air hardening (i.e., by available interfacing friction).

The invention also provides an engine block with one or more anti-friction coated cylinder bores. The block comprises: (a) a cast aluminium based cylinder block having at least one cylinder bore wall; (b) an oil-attracting coating of grains fused to each other and to said bore wall, said grains comprising agglomerates of particles of at least two oil-attracting solid lubricants and hardened, fused particles, the solid lubricant particles being selected from the group consisting of graphite molybdenum disulfide, boron nitride, lithium fluoride, calcium fluoride, and eutectic mixtures of LiF/CaF_2 or LiF/NaF , the coating having been finish-honed to expose certain margins of the fused particles.

The invention will now be described further, by way of example, with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

Figure 1 is a schematic illustration of a microscopic section of a coating system embodying the principles of this invention;

Figure 2 is an enlarged sectional illustration of a

grain of powder for use in the method in accordance with this invention;

Figure 3 is a view like Figure 2, but illustrating an alternative powder grain composition;

Figure 3a is a further enlarged view of one type of particle forming part of the grain of Figure 3;

Figure 3b is a further enlarged view of another type of particle forming part of the grain of Figure 3;

Figure 4 is a greatly enlarged schematic illustration of a microscopic section of a freshly deposited plasma sprayed coating;

Figure 5 is a schematic representation of the forces that influence coulomb friction;

Figure 6 is a highly enlarged microscopic view in cross-section of interfacing surfaces showing the irregularities of normal surfaces that affect coulomb friction;

Figure 7 is a view similar to Figure 6 showing the incorporation of solid films on the interfacing surfaces that affect coulomb friction;

Figure 8 is a graphical illustration of the onset of plastic flow of surface films as a function of stress and temperature;

Figure 9 is a graphical illustration of surface energy (hardness) as a function of temperature for surface films;

Figure 10 is a graphical illustration of the coefficient of friction for block graphite as a function of time;

Figure 11 is a graphical illustration of the coefficient of friction and also of wear as a function of time for a coating system comprising graphite and boron nitride tested at the temperature of 260°C (500°F);

Figure 12 is a block diagram showing schematically the steps involved in the method of making the coated components of this invention;

Figure 13 is an enlarged sectional view of a portion of a liner in position for being installed in a cylinder block bore and carrying the coatings necessary to this invention;

Figure 14 is a schematic illustration of the mechanics involved in reciprocating a piston within a cylinder bore showing the travel of the piston rings which promote a loading on the cylinder bore coating system;

Figure 15 is a view of the coating apparatus for depositing at high temperatures a plasma metallic-based coating on a cylinder bore shown in cross-section; and

Figure 16 is a cross-sectional illustration of an internal combustion engine incorporating the coating system of this invention showing one coated cylinder bore in its environment for reducing the total engine friction, vibration, and fuel consumption for such engine.

To achieve a significant reduction in the coefficient of friction at high temperatures between normally oil-bathed metal contact surfaces, loaded to at least 70 kPa

(10 psi), the coating system cannot rely on graphite or any one lubricant by itself, but rather upon a specific combination of solid lubricants entrained in an air-hardenable metallic framework that, when honed to a smooth interfacing surface, will function as wear-resistant, anti-friction bearing surfaces.

As shown in Figure 1, the inventive system comprises a layer A of powder grains adhered to a metal substrate or wall 10, each grain containing an agglomeration 11 of oil-attracting solid lubricant particles and air-hardenable, fusible ingredients surrounding each of the solid lubricant particles. The oil-attracting solid lubricant particles are selected from the group consisting of graphite, molybdenum disulfide, boron nitride, calcium difluoride, lithium fluoride, and eutectic mixtures of LiF/CaF₂ or LiF/NaF. The fusible air-hardenable ingredients are preferably a stainless steel consisting of about 4-24% chromium, 6-12% nickel when used, 4-6% manganese when used, 0-4% Al, and the remainder iron. The solid lubricants are stable at 315-425°C (600-800°F) and give the coating high temperature stability for use in the cylinder bores of internal combustion engines. The grains adhere to the substrate as a result of fusion when the shells 12 of the fusible particles are softened as a result of thermal spraying. The unfused portion 13 of the air-hardenable particles provides an encapsulation in part for the solid lubricant-containing core.

The powder, useful as a raw material in creating the coating system, is comprised of powder grains 14, such as shown in Figure 2, which are agglomerates 11 of solid lubricant particles 15, here being boron nitride 15a, molybdenum disulfide 15b, graphite 15c, calcium difluoride 15d, and lithium fluoride 15e. Such solid lubricant particles are interspersed with air-hardenable steel particles 16 which are held together by a low melting medium or binder, such as wax, 17. The steel particles are selected from iron alloys containing (i) 8-20% chromium and 1-4% aluminium; (ii) 4-20% chromium, 4-6% Mn, and 6-12% Ni; and (iii) stainless steel having 15-24% Cr, and 8% nickel. The wax binder can be a wax having the following composition: 0.5-2.0% conventional carbowax, gum arabic, and poly vinyl alcohol. The solid lubricant particles preferably have a size in the range of 5-40 microns; the steel particles have a starting average particle size in the range of 20-50 microns. The agglomerated particles (in the wax binder) form grains having a size in the range of 40-55 microns. Such particle and grain size ranges are important because they make possible a flowable powder useful in the thermal spray deposition process. When the size is substantially below 40 microns, the powder will not flow freely; when significantly above 55 microns, stratification of the different particles will occur. The particles of solid lubricant desirably should be in a proportion of 15-25% of each grain with the steel particles being 74-84% by volume, the wax binder constituting less than 4% of the grains. However, the wax binder burns off during thermal spraying.

As shown in Figure 3, the solid lubricant particles 15 may be encapsulated within a metal shell 18 prior to agglomeration by wax; shell metal or metal alloy is selected from the group consisting of nickel, copper, iron, and cobalt. Such encapsulated particles are created by a prior treatment wherein solid lubricants are placed in a molten bath of the metal and stirred, and then the slurry is comminuted so as to form the encapsulated lubricant particles 20 (Figure 3a). Similarly, the steel particles 16 may be encapsulated in the same type of shell 18 by a similar process to form a particle 21 (see Figure 3b). Alternatively, the metal encapsulation may be provided by hydrometallurgy whereby solid film lubricant particles are suspended in a solution of the easily decomposed salt of the metal at higher temperatures and pressure, the metal deposits on the surface of the particles.

The encapsulated particles then are bound together by the wax 17 to form the grains as previously discussed (see Figure 3). Other hard particles 19 may be incorporated along with the encapsulated particles. The optional hard particles or encapsulated particles facilitate harder bearing surfaces or silts uniformly distributed throughout the coating. The powder may be made alternatively by spray drying; to this end, a water-based slurry of very fine particles is prepared (the particles are solid lubricants and soft metals (Ni, Co, etc.)). The slurry is blended with .5-1.5% by weight water soluble organic binder such as gum arabic and/or polyvinyl alcohol or carbowax. The blended slurry is then atomised into a hot circulating air chamber at or about 150°C (300°F).

As shown in Figure 4, the preferred coating, when operatively used, will have a glazed or polished outer surface 60 as a result of engine start-up use and will have edges 61 of the steel particle network 62 exposed as a result of honing to function much like needle bearings within the coating. The coating has a significantly useful porosity 23 which retains fluid oil for additional lubrication.

Friction in an oil-bathed environment will be dependent partly upon fluid friction and the oil film (layers in the fluid sheared at different velocities, commonly referred to as hydrodynamic friction), and, more importantly, dependent on dry or coulomb friction between contacting solid, rigid bodies (also referred to as boundary friction). Dry friction is tangential and opposed to the direction of sliding interengagement. As shown in Figure 5, there is a visualisation of the mechanical action of friction. The weight of a block (or applied load) imposes a normal force N on table C that is spread across several load forces N-1 at each interengaging hump 22 (see Figure 6). The composite of all the tangential components of the small reaction forces F-1 at each of the interengaged humps 22 is the total friction force F. The humps are the inherent irregularities or asperities in any surface on a microscopic scale. When the interengaging surfaces are in relative motion, the contacts are more nearly along the tops of the humps and therefore the tangential

reaction forces will be smaller. When the bodies are at rest, the coefficient of friction will be greater. Friction is influenced by the deformation and tearing of surface irregularities, hardness of the interengaged surfaces, and the presence of surface film such as oxides or oils. As a result, actual friction will be different from idealised perfect contact friction and will depend upon the ratio between shear and yield stresses of the interengaged surfaces. Thus, the presence of a film on each of the interengaging surfaces (see Figure 7) will serve to change the coefficient of friction depending upon the shear and yield stress capacities of the films and their relative hardness.

Friction is also influenced significantly by temperature because high local temperatures can influence adhesion at the contact points. As shown in Figure 8, as temperature goes up, the critical stress for slip goes down, exposing more surface to sliding and thereby increasing friction. As shown in Figure 9, as the temperature approaches melting, the hardness (E) goes down, resulting in galling and scuffing. This is accounted for in the friction equation:

$$f \propto 1/(T_s - T),$$

T_s being the surface temperature and T being the bulk temperature of the sliding part.

The influence of temperature is particularly evident on graphite as shown in Figure 10: The coefficient of friction for block graphite rapidly increases to above .4 at 260°C (500°F) and above .5 at 425°C (800°F), and even higher at 540°C (1000°F). The coefficient of friction for graphite at 205°C (400°F) or lower becomes generally uniform at below .05. Contrast this with the coefficient of friction performance and wear performance of the coating system containing both graphite and boron nitride represented in Figure 11. You will note that the coefficient of friction generally uniformly stays below .1, and wear is generally uniform at about 25 µm (0.001")/100 hours at 260°C (500°F) (see Figure 11). The coating for Figure 11 comprises only particles of graphite, boron nitride, and a thermoset polymer.

At least two different solid lubricant particles must be present in the powder grains. Graphite, when selected, should be present in an amount of 20-70% by weight of the solid lubricants. Graphite, as earlier indicated, is effective as a solid lubricant only up to temperatures around 205°C (400°F) and possesses very poor load bearing capability such as that experienced by a piston ring scraping against the graphite itself. Molybdenum disulfide, when selected, should be present in an amount of 20-70% by weight of the solid lubricants, and, most importantly, is effective in increasing the load bearing capability as well as the temperature of low friction stability of the mixture up to a temperature of at least 305°C (580°F), but will break down into molybdenum and sulfur at temperatures in excess of 305°C (580°F) in air or non-

reducing atmospheres. Molybdenum disulfide reduces friction in the absence of oil or in the presence of oil, and, most importantly, supports loads of at least 70 kPa (10 psi) at such high temperatures. Molybdenum disulfide is also an oil attractor and is very useful in this invention. Boron nitride, when selected, should be present in an amount of 5-40% by weight of the solid lubricants, and increases the stability of the mixture up to temperatures as high as 700°F and concurrently stabilises the low friction temperature limit for the ingredients of molybdenum disulfide and graphite. Boron nitride is also an effective oil attractor. Calcium difluoride and lithium fluoride are oil attractors, and are stable up to temperatures of 815°C (1500°F) and 650°C (1200°F), respectively, and resist loads of at least 70 kPa (10 psi). The coating A must be porous, having a pore volume 23 of about 2-10%, as shown in Figure 4. Porosity allows fluid oil to be retained in the pores of the coating as an impregnant during operation of the engine. Such temperature stability is important because typical engine cylinder bore wall will experience, at certain zones thereof and under certain engine operating conditions such as failure of coolant or oil pump, temperatures as high as 370°C (700°F) even though the hottest zone of the cylinder bore surface in the combustion chamber, during normal operation, is only about 540°F. The optimum mixture contains all of such solid lubricant ingredients, which will provide for a temperature, stability up to temperatures as high as 425°C (800°F), load bearing capacities of at least 70 kPa (10 psi), and excellent oil attraction capability. The coefficient of friction for the grains in the deposited condition will be in the range of .07-.08 at room temperature, and a coefficient of friction as low as .03 at 370°C (700°F).

Method of Making Coated Surfaces

As shown in Figure 12, the comprehensive method of making coated surfaces such as cylinder bore walls, according to this invention, comprises the series of steps: (a) forming grains of agglomerated particles, the particles including solid lubricants and air-hardenable metals; (b) providing a light metal or light metal alloy surface, the metal being selected from the group of aluminium, magnesium, silicon, and titanium; (c) thermally spraying the agglomerated particles onto the surface, the cylinder surface may be the parent bore surface of a cylinder block; (d) honing the sprayed coating on the surface to a predetermined thickness and smoothness to expose edges of the metallic fused network of the coating as well as smear the solid lubricants across the honed surface; and (e) subjecting the honed coating to frictional use to harden at least some portion of the metallic content of the grains of the coating.

Such method provides several new features that should be mentioned here. (i) Plasma sprayed powder will form a controlled porosity that allows for impregnation of wet oil; (ii) the encapsulated powder grains create

asperities in the surface such that, when honed, the edges of the shell metal provide a smaller localised area of hard supporting asperities where boundary layer shear will take place in the smeared solid lubricant thereover to further reduce friction (similar to microgrooving); and (iii) the adherent metal network created as a result of melting only the outer skin of the soft metal shells during plasma spraying.

As shown in Figure 13, if a liner 14 is used as the surface to be coated, the liner 14 would preferably be constituted of the same material as that of the parent bore surface 15. However, the liner can be any metal that has a higher strength than the metal of the parent bore wall; this is often achieved by making an alloy of the metal used for the parent bore wall. For example, C-355 or C-356 aluminium alloys for the liner are stronger than the 319 aluminium alloy commonly used for aluminium engine blocks. The liner must have, generally, thermal conductivity and thermal expansion characteristics essentially the same as the block. Preferably, only the liner is coated interiorly at 18, as will be described subsequently, and the liner then assembled to the parent bore by either being frozen to about a temperature of -40°C (-40°F) while maintaining the parent bore at room temperature, or the parent bore may be heated to 130°C (270°F) while the liner is retained at room temperature. In either case, a shrink-fit is obtained by placing the liner in such differential temperature condition within the parent bore 15. Preferably, the liner is coated at 17 on its exterior surface 16 with a copper flake epoxy mixture (70-90% copper flake), the epoxy being of the type described for use in coating. The copper flake within such epoxy coating assures not only an extremely solid bond between the liner and the light metal parent bore, but also increases the thermal transfer therebetween on a microscopic scale. The liner may also be cast-in-place when the block or bore wall is being formed; such liner would then be treated as the parent bore surface. In such case, the liner can also be made from the solid film lubricants and air-hardenable metal powder composition and formed into a liner shape by conventional powder metal forming and sintering techniques.

Plasma spraying of a flowable powder is carried out to form an adherent porous layer of powder grains on the bore wall or surface, the powder consisting of particles of at least two solid lubricants selected from the group of graphite, molybdenum disulfide, boron nitride, calcium difluoride, and lithium fluoride. The flowable powder can be and often is a composite of the solid film lubricant and the soft metal powder produced by spray drying in which a combustible, ash-free, organic binder (such as 1% carbowax) and/or 0.5% gum arabic are used to produce the slurry from which the spray-dried powder is produced. The coating is also subjected to high temperature frictional use to harden at least a portion of the metallic contents of the grains.

It is desirable to not only have powder grains of solid

lubricant encased in a soft metal shell, such as nickel, but also powder grains of solid hard metal such as Fe-CrMn or FeMn. The outer shells of these two different grains will melt and alloy-fuse during plasma spraying to create an even harder alloyed metal network such as FeCrNiMn and FeNiMn.

It may be possible, in some cases, to coat only a segment 25 of the entire cylinder bore surface 15. As shown in Figure 14, the location of conventional sliding piston rings 26 moves linearly along the bore wall a distance 27. The locus of the piston ring contact with the coating is moved by the crank arm 28 during an angle representing about 60° of crank movement. This distance is about one-third of the full linear movement of the piston rings (between top dead centre (TDC) and bottom dead centre (BDC)). The distance represents the hot zone of the bore wall where lubrication can vary and the bore wall is most susceptible to drag and piston slap, which is the source of a significant portion of engine friction losses, and also the cause of scuffing of the bore wall in case of wet lubricant failure. The segment 25 would desirably be undercut to receive the thermally sprayed coating in a thickness that fills at least the undercut. Then, on honing simultaneously both the filled undercut and aligned bore wall, a smooth surface for the piston rings is created.

Plasma spraying may be carried out by equipment, as illustrated in Figure 15, which uses a spray gun 30 having a pair of interior electrodes 30a and 30b that create an arc through which powdered metal and inert gas are introduced to form a plasma. The powder may be introduced through a supply line 31 connected to a slip ring 32 that in turn connects to a powder channel 33 that delivers to the nozzle 34. The plasma heats the powder, being carried therewith, along the shells of the powder only. The gun is carried on an articulating arm 35 which is moved in a combined circular linear movement by a journal 36 carried on an eccentric positioner 37 which in turn is carried on a rotating disc 38 moved by motor 39. The nozzle 34 of the gun is entrained in a fixed swivel journal 40 so that the spray pattern 41 is moved both annularly as well as linearly up and down the bore surface 15 as a result of the articulating motion of the gun. Variations of the plasma spray coating can be obtained by mixing particles consisting of nickel or cobalt encapsulating solid lubricants along with hard particles such as ferro-chrome or ferro-manganese. The hard particles will produce a very hard matrix deposit due to the interaction alloying with nickel in the hot plasma flame to create intermetallics. This is a very desirable condition for decreased wear without any increase in friction. In such cases, only a very thin upper solid film lubricant coating is needed.

The thickness of the coating should be controlled to about 120-140 microns allowing for the subsequent removal of about 100 microns by honing. Honing should be carried out by conventional honing stones to not affect the chemistry of the coating.

Proper selection of the metallic content of the particles in the powder material will allow for an important feature of this invention, which is the air hardening of a portion of such metallic content to a very hard condition while the other metallic portion resides in situ in the coating itself. To this end, the coating is subjected to high temperature frictional use, such as engine usage itself, whereby combustion gases and the frictional scraping of the piston rings subjects the exposed portions of the coating to heat and pressure that causes hardening to take place within the exposed steel itself. It is the carbon in FeCr and in the solid film lubricant that makes such hardening possible. The hardness conversion can be explained as follows: the fused particle, as it cools through melting and solidifying, will form an air-hardenable steel composition such as Hadfield manganese steel.

Yet another aspect of this invention is the completed product resulting from the practice of the method and use of the chemistry described herein. As shown in Figure 16, the product is an engine block with at least one anti-friction coated cylinder bore. The product comprises: (a) a cast aluminium alloy based cylinder block having at least one cylinder bore wall; (b) a hard, load-supporting face on the wall; and (c) a mixture adherent on said face, which mixture comprises oil-attracting solid lubricant particles and fused, air-hardened steel particles, the mixture supporting loads of at least 70 kPa (10 psi) at temperatures of 315-425°C (600-800°F) while being stable at such temperatures, the mixture having at least two elements selected from the group consisting of graphite, molybdenum disulfide, boron nitride, calcium difluoride, sodium fluoride, and lithium fluoride.

Such product is characterized by a reduction in engine friction resulting from reduction of piston system friction of at least 25% because of the ability to operate the engine with near zero piston/cylinder bore clearance as well as a reduction in mechanical boundary friction. Furthermore, such product provides for reduction in the hydrocarbon emissions from the engine by at least 25% because of the adaptation of the piston ring designs disclosed in concurrently filed patent applications and thereby reduce the top land crevice volume. The blow-by of the engine (combustion gases blowing past the piston rings) is reduced also by 25% because of the near zero clearance combined with the piston ring design just cited. Furthermore, the temperature of the coolant used to maintain proper temperature of the engine can be reduced by 11°C (20°F) because a significantly lower viscosity oil can be used with such change. The oil temperature can be reduced by at least 28°C (50°F), when coupled with the avoidance of tar deposit formation on the combustion chamber surfaces, and an increase in the compression ratio of the engine by at least one with the attendant improvement in fuel economy and power.

Another significant aspect of the coated block, in accordance with this invention, is the ability for resisting formic acid formation using flex fuels containing metha-

not. Typically, an engine would have its surfaces degrade at 32 000 km (20,000 miles) or greater as a result of the formation of formic acid under a peculiar set of engine conditions with such flex fuels. With the use of the coated bore walls as herein, such resistance to formic acid corrosion is eliminated. Moreover, the coated product obtains greater accuracy of roundness within the cylinder bore as the conventional rings ride thereagainst, contributing to the reduction in blow-by as mentioned earlier.

The coated block plays an important role in the overall operation of engine efficiency. As shown in Figure 16, the block has an interior cooling jacket 45 along its sides, and cooperates to receive a head 46 containing intake and exhaust passages 47, 48 opened and closed by intake and exhaust valves 49, 50 operated by a valve train 51 actuated by camshafts 52. The combustible gases are ignited by spark ignition 53 located centrally of the combustion chamber 54 to move the piston 55, which in turn actuates a connecting rod 56 to turn a crankshaft 57 rotating within a crank case 58. Oil is drawn from the crank case 58 and splashed within the interior of the block to lubricate and bathe the piston 55 during its reciprocal movement therein. The cooling fluid circulates about the cylinder bore wall to extract heat therefrom, which influences the efficiency of the engine by reducing the heat input into the air/fuel charge during the intake stroke, and thus increases volumetric efficiency as well as power and fuel economy.

Claims

1. A solid lubricant coating system comprising an oil-lubricated light metal or light metal alloy substrate (10) subject to sliding wear at high temperatures and having a porous coating comprising a layer (A) of grains of agglomerated particles of solid lubricant (15) and fused metal particles (16), said grains being thermally adhered to said substrate, characterised in that said grains consist of
 - i) at least two different oil-attracting solid lubricants selected from the group consisting of graphite, molybdenum disulfide, boron nitride, calcium fluoride, sodium fluoride and lithium fluoride, and
 - ii) hardened particles of air-hardenable metal, fused together as a network (62) and having exposed edges (61).
2. A coating system according to claim 1 in which the solid lubricants are selected from the group consisting of graphite, molybdenum disulfide, boron nitride, calcium fluoride and eutectic mixtures of lithium fluoride with calcium fluoride or sodium fluoride.
3. A coating system according to claim 1 or claim 2 in

which said air-hardenable metal is steel.

4. A coating system according to claim 3 in which said solid lubricant particles comprise, by volume, 15-25%, and said steel particles 74-85% of said grains.
5. A coating system according to claim 3 or claim 4 in which said steel is stainless steel containing 15-24% chromium and about 8% nickel, the balance being iron.
6. A coating system according to claim 3 or claim 4 in which said steel is stainless steel containing 8-20% Cr, 2-8% Mn and 8-16% Ni.
7. A coating system according to claim 3 or claim 4 in which said steel is alloy steel containing 4-8% Mn, 4-20% Cr, 2-4% Ni and 0.1-0.4% C.
8. A coating system according to any preceding claim wherein the substrate is a wall (15; 18) of a cylinder bore or cylinder liner of an internal combustion engine.
9. A method of producing a solid lubricant coating system according to any preceding claim, comprising the steps of:

a) forming grains of agglomerated particles of

- i) at least two different oil-attracting solid lubricants selected from the group consisting of graphite, molybdenum disulfide, boron nitride, calcium fluoride, sodium fluoride and lithium fluoride, and
- ii) fusable air-hardenable metal,

the particles being bound together in the agglomerates by a low-melting, thermally removable medium,

b) thermally spraying the grains on to a light metal or light metal alloy substrate in a thickness of 120-250 microns so as to substantially eliminate the medium and fuse adjacent particles together to form a porous adherent network of air-hardenable metal around said solid lubricant particles,

c) removing a portion of the fused particles to expose edges of said fused particles, and

d) subjecting the exposed edges to air-hardening.

10. A method according to claim 9 in which the low-melting medium is wax or a thermally removable thermoplastic polymer.
11. A method according to claim 9 or claim 10 in which

the thermal spraying is carried out by plasma spraying to deposit a coating having a porosity of 2-10%.

12. A method according to any of claims 9 to 11 in which the solid lubricant particles and/or the fusable metal particles in the grains are encapsulated with nickel, cobalt or copper, and air-hardenable alloy results from fusion of the particles during thermal spraying.
13. A method according to claim 12 in which the grains also include hard particles and the hard particles are also encapsulated.
14. A method according to any of claims 9 to 13 in which said grains have a particle size in the range of 15-20 microns.
15. A method according to any of claims 9 to 14 in which step (c) is carried out by honing.

Patentansprüche

1. Ein Beschichtungssystem aus Festschmierstoffen, das ein ölgeschmiertes Substrat (10) aus Leichtmetall oder Leichtmetalllegierung umfaßt, das Gleitverschleiß bei hohen Temperaturen ausgesetzt ist und eine poröse Beschichtung besitzt, die eine Schicht (A) aus Körnern von agglomerierten Partikeln aus Festschmierstoff (15) und verschmolzenen Metallpartikeln (16) umfaßt, wobei diese Körner thermisch an diesem Substrat zum Haften gebracht werden, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß diese Körner

- i) aus mindestens zwei verschiedenen ölanziehenden Festschmierstoffen, die aus der aus Graphit, Molybdändisulfid, Bornitrid, Calciumfluorid, Natriumfluorid und Lithiumfluorid bestehenden Reihe ausgewählt sind, und
- ii) aus gehärteten Partikeln eines an der Luft härtbaren Metalls bestehen, die als vernetzte Struktur (62) zusammengeschweißt sind und exponierte Kanten (61) besitzen.

2. Ein Beschichtungssystem nach Anspruch 1, worin die Festschmierstoffe aus der aus Graphit, Molybdändisulfid, Bornitrid, Calciumfluorid und eutektischen Mischungen aus Lithiumfluorid mit Calciumfluorid oder Natriumfluorid bestehenden Reihe ausgewählt sind.

3. Ein Beschichtungssystem nach Anspruch 1 oder 2, in dem dieses an der Luft härtende Metall Stahl ist.

4. Ein Beschichtungssystem nach Anspruch 3, in dem diese Festschmierstoffpartikel 15-25 Volumenprozent und diese Stahlpartikel 74-85 Volumenprozent

dieser Körner darstellen.

5. Ein Beschichtungssystem nach Anspruch 3 oder 4, in dem dieser Stahl Edelstahl ist, der 15-24% Chrom und etwa 8% Nickel und als Rest Eisen enthält. 5
6. Ein Beschichtungssystem nach Anspruch 3 oder 4, in dem dieser Stahl Edelstahl ist, der 8-20% Chrom, 2-8% Mangan und 8-16% Nickel enthält. 10
7. Ein Beschichtungssystem nach Anspruch 3 oder 4, in dem dieser Stahl eine Stahllegierung ist, die 4-8% Mangan, 4-20% Chrom, 2-4% Nickel und 0,1-0,4% Kohlenstoff enthält. 15
8. Ein Beschichtungssystem nach irgendeinem der vorhergehenden Ansprüche, worin das Substrat eine Wand (15; 18) einer Zylinderbohrung oder eines Zylindereinsatzes eines Verbrennungsmotors ist. 20
9. Ein Verfahren zur Herstellung eines Beschichtungssystems aus Festschmierstoffen nach irgendeinem der vorhergehenden Ansprüche, das folgende Schritte umfaßt: 25

a) Bildung von Körnern agglomerierter Partikel aus

- i) mindestens zwei verschiedenen ölanziehenden Festschmierstoffen, die aus der aus Graphit, Molybdändisulfid, Bornitrid, Calciumfluorid, Natriumfluorid und Lithiumfluorid bestehenden Reihe ausgewählt sind; und 30
- ii) einem schmelzbaren, an der Luft härtbaren Metall, 35

wobei die Partikel in den Agglomeraten von einem niedrigschmelzenden, thermisch entfernbaren Medium zusammengehalten werden, 40

b) Heißspritzen der Körner auf ein Substrat aus Leichtmetall oder Leichtmetalllegierung in einem Dickenbereich von 100-250 µ, um das Medium im wesentlichen zu beseitigen und benachbarte Partikel miteinander zu verschmelzen, um eine poröse, anhaftende, vernetzte Struktur aus an der Luft härtbarem Metall um diese Festschmierstoffpartikel herum zu bilden, 45

c) Beseitigung eines Teiles der verschmolzenen Partikel, um Kanten dieser verschmolzenen Partikel freizugeben, und

d) Aussetzen der freigelegten Kanten dem Härten an der Luft. 50

10. Ein Verfahren nach Anspruch 9, in dem das niedrigschmelzende Medium ein Wachs oder ein ther- 55

misch entfernbares thermoplastisches Polymer ist.

11. Ein Verfahren nach Anspruch 9 oder Anspruch 10, in dem das Heißspritzen mittels Plasmaspritzen durchgeführt wird, um eine Beschichtung mit einer Porosität von 2-10% abzuscheiden.
12. Ein Verfahren nach irgendeinem der Ansprüche 9 bis 11, in dem die Festschmierstoffpartikel und/oder die Partikel aus schmelzbarem Metall in den Körnern mit Nickel, Kobalt oder Kupfer verkapselt sind, und die an der Luft härtbare Legierung aus dem Verschmelzen der Partikel beim Heißspritzen resultiert.
13. Ein Verfahren nach Anspruch 12, in dem die Körner ebenso harte Partikel einschließen und auch die harten Partikel verkapselt sind.
14. Ein Verfahren nach irgendeinem der Ansprüche 9 bis 13, in dem diese Körner eine Partikelgröße im Bereich von 15-20 µ besitzen.
15. Ein Verfahren nach irgendeinem der Ansprüche 9 bis 14, in dem Schritt (c) durch Zieh Schleifen durchgeführt wird.

Revendications

1. Système de revêtement en lubrifiant solide comprenant un substrat en métal léger ou en alliage de métal léger lubrifié par huile (10) soumis à une usure de glissement à haute température et comportant un revêtement poreux comprenant une couche (A) de grains de particules agrégées de lubrifiant solide (15) et de particules de métal fondues (16), lesdits grains étant fixés audit substrat par projection à chaud, caractérisé en ce que lesdits grains sont constitués de

- i) au moins deux lubrifiants solides différents attracteurs d'huile choisis parmi le groupe constitué du graphite, du bisulfure de molybdène, du nitrure de bore, du fluorure de calcium, du fluorure de sodium et du fluorure de lithium, et
- ii) de particules durcies de métal durcissable à l'air, fixées ensemble par fusion sous forme d'un réseau (62) et présentant des arêtes exposées (61).

2. Système de revêtement selon la revendication 1, dans lequel les lubrifiants solides sont choisis parmi le groupe constitué du graphite, du bisulfure de molybdène, du nitrure de bore, du fluorure de calcium, et de mélanges étectiques de fluorure de lithium avec du fluorure de calcium ou du fluorure de so-

dium.

3. Système de revêtement selon la revendication 1 ou la revendication 2, dans lequel ledit métal durcissable à l'air est de l'acier.

5

4. Système de revêtement selon la revendication 3, dans lequel lesdites particules de lubrifiant solide représentent, en volume, 15 à 25 % desdits grains, et lesdites particules d'acier représentent 74 à 85 % de ceux-ci.

10

5. Système de revêtement selon la revendication 3 ou la revendication 4, dans lequel ledit acier est de l'acier inoxydable contenant de 15 à 24 % de chrome et environ 8 % de nickel, le reste étant du fer.

15

6. Système de revêtement selon la revendication 3 ou la revendication 4, dans lequel ledit acier est de l'acier inoxydable contenant de 8 à 20 % de chrome, de 2 à 8 % de manganèse et de 8 à 16 % de nickel.

20

7. Système de revêtement selon la revendication 3 ou la revendication 4, dans lequel ledit acier est de l'acier allié contenant de 4 à 8 % de manganèse, de 4 à 20 % de chrome, de 2 à 4 % de nickel et de 0,1 à 0,4 % de carbone.

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8. Système de revêtement selon l'une quelconque des revendications précédentes, dans lequel le substrat est une paroi (15; 18) d'un alésage de cylindre ou d'une chemise de cylindre d'un moteur à combustion interne.

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9. Procédé de réalisation d'un système de revêtement en lubrifiant solide selon l'une quelconque des revendications précédentes, comprenant les étapes consistant à :

35

a) former des grains de particules agrégées de

40

i) au moins deux lubrifiants solides différents attracteurs d'huile choisis parmi le groupe constitué du graphite, du bisulfure de molybdène, du nitrure de bore, du fluorure de calcium, du fluorure de sodium et du fluorure de lithium, et

45

ii) de métal durcissable à l'air pouvant être fondu, les particules étant liées ensemble dans les agrégats par un milieu à bas point de fusion, pouvant être éliminé à chaud,

50

b) projeter à chaud les grains sur un substrat en métal léger ou en alliage de métal léger suivant une épaisseur de 120 à 250 microns de manière à éliminer substantiellement le milieu et à fondre les particules adjacentes ensemble afin de former un réseau poreux adhérent de

55

métal durcissable à l'air autour desdites particules de lubrifiant solide,

c) enlever une partie des particules fondues afin de rendre apparentes des arêtes desdites particules fondues, et

d) soumettre les arêtes apparentes à un durcissement à l'air.

10. Procédé selon la revendication 9, dans lequel le milieu à bas point de fusion est de la cire ou un polymère thermoplastique pouvant être éliminé à chaud.

11. Procédé selon la revendication 9 ou la revendication 10, dans lequel la projection à chaud est effectuée par projection au plasma d'un revêtement présentant une porosité de 2 à 10 %.

12. Procédé selon l'une quelconque des revendications 9 à 11, dans lequel les particules de lubrifiant solide et/ou les particules de métal pouvant être fondues présentes dans les grains sont enrobées de nickel, de cobalt ou de cuivre, et un alliage durcissable à l'air résulte de la fusion des particules lors de la projection à chaud.

13. Procédé selon la revendication 12, dans lequel les grains comprennent également des particules dures, et les particules dures sont également enrobées.

14. Procédé selon l'une quelconque des revendications 9 à 13, dans lequel lesdits grains présentent une grosseur de particule comprise dans la plage de 15 à 20 microns.

15. Procédé selon l'une quelconque des revendications 9 à 14, dans lequel l'étape (c) est effectuée par rodage.

FIG-1

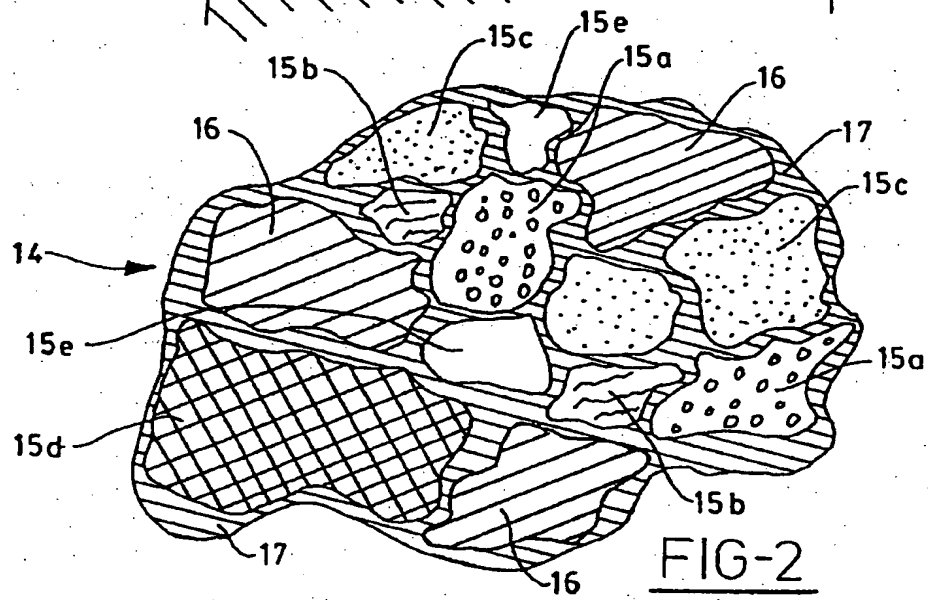
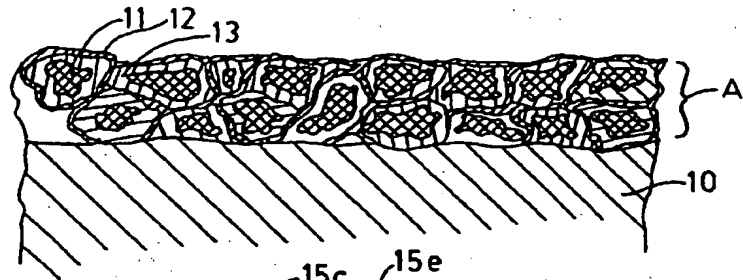


FIG-2

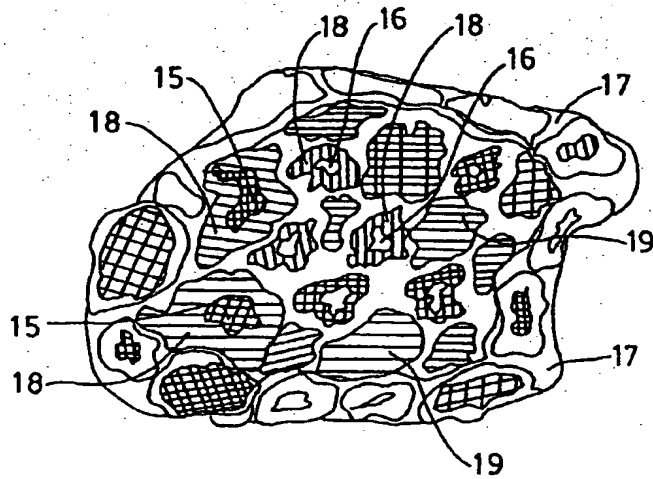


FIG-3

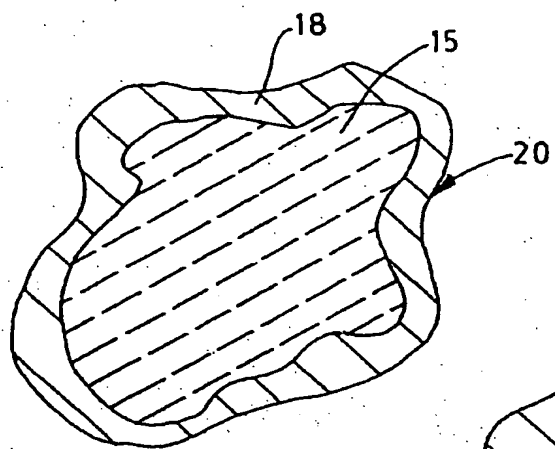


FIG-3a

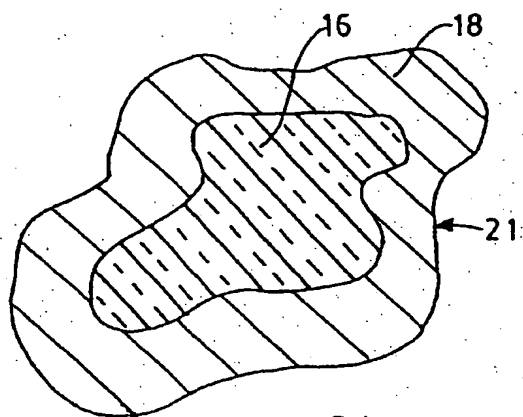


FIG-3b

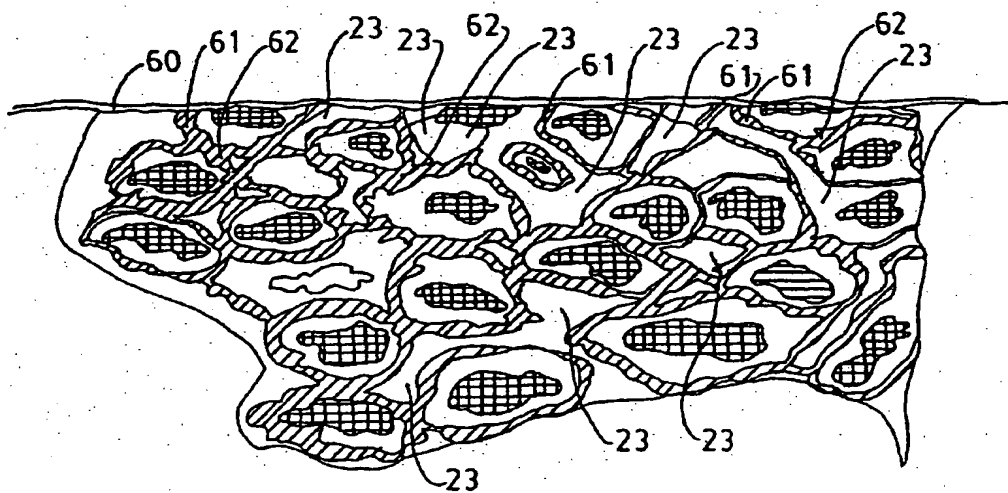


FIG-4

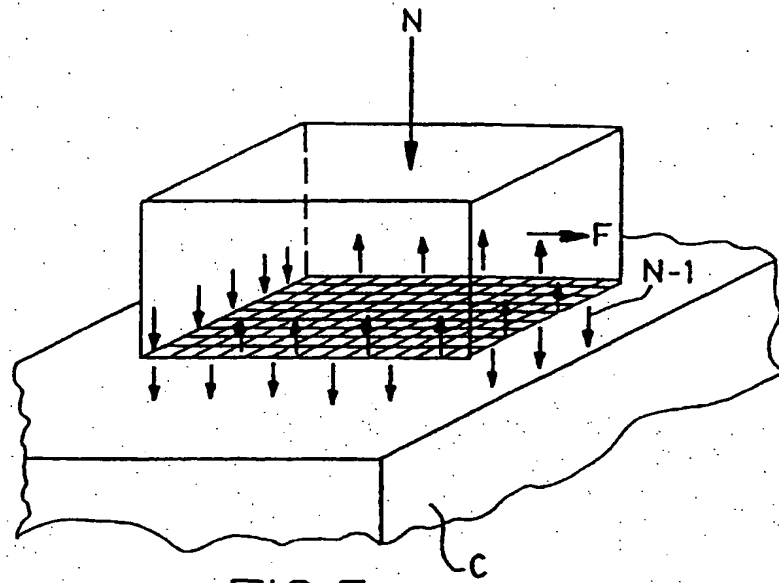


FIG-5

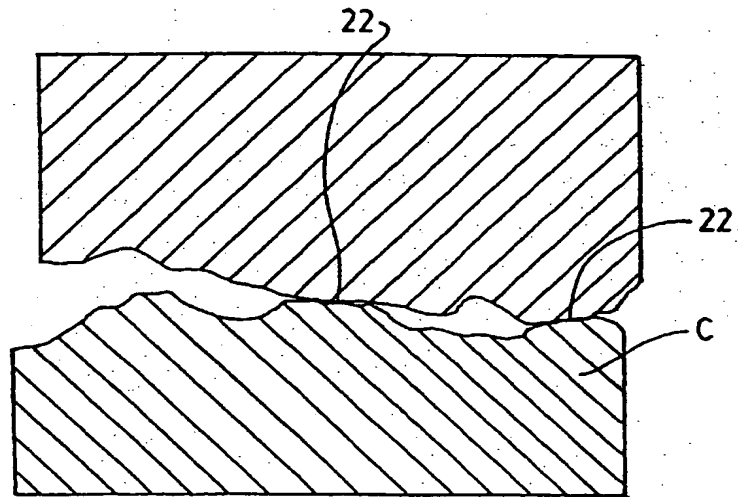


FIG-6

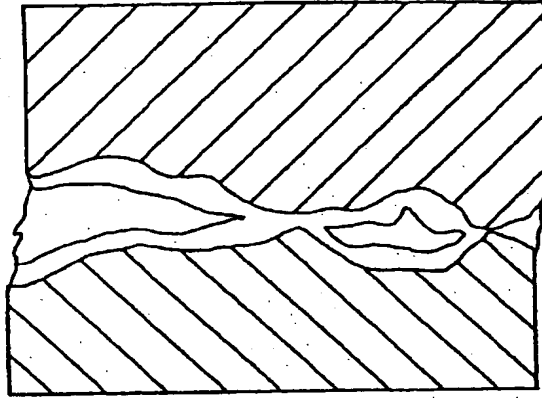


FIG-7

T_s = CRITICAL RESOLVED STRESS FOR SLIP
(ONSET OF PLASTIC FLOW)

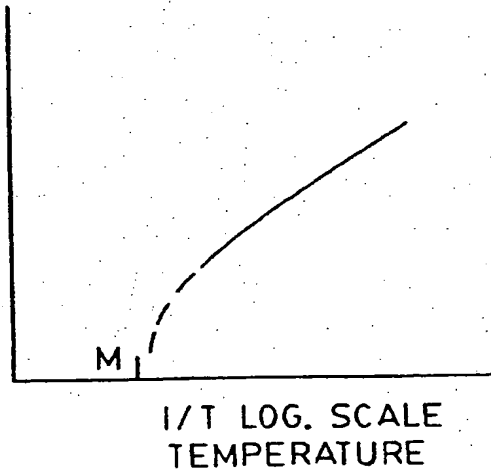


FIG-8

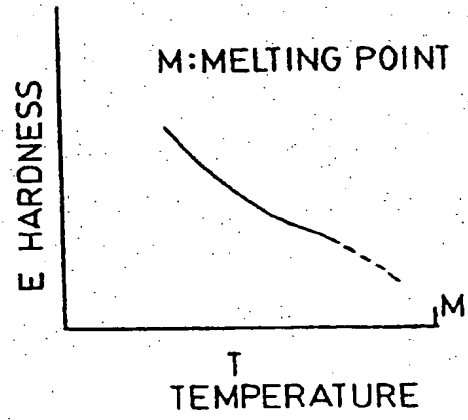
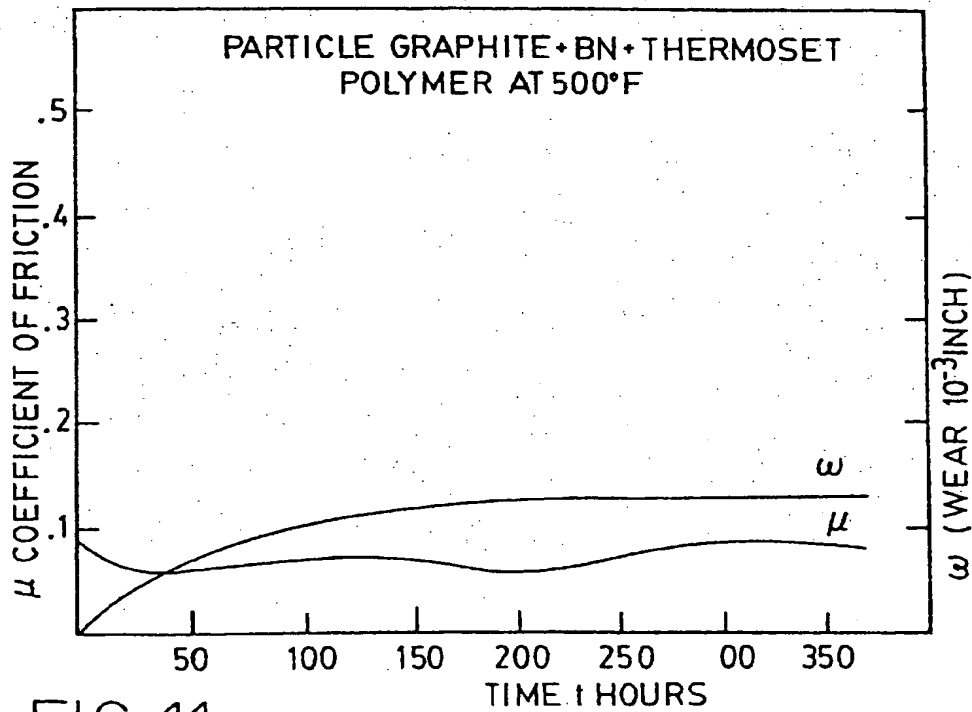
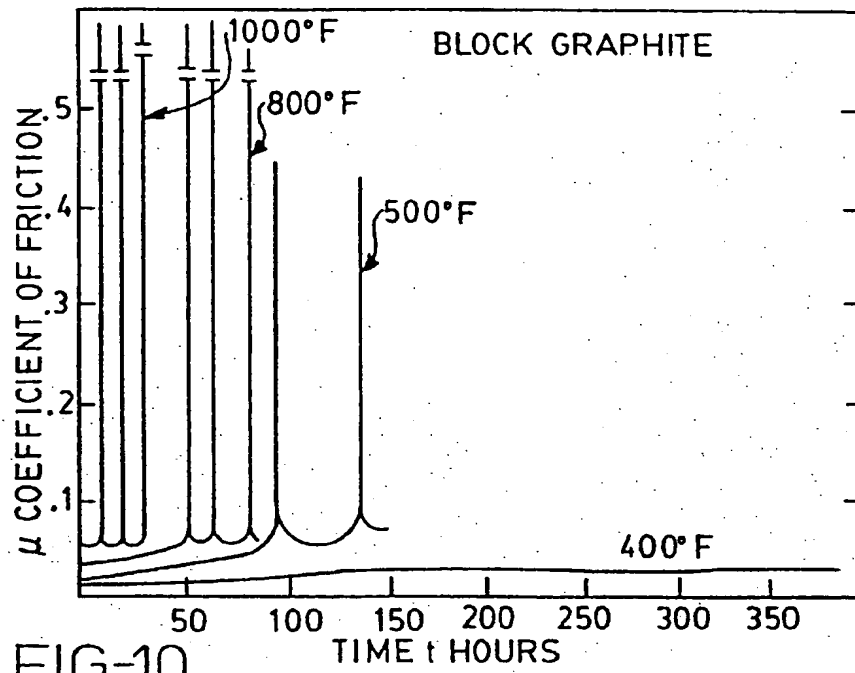


FIG-9



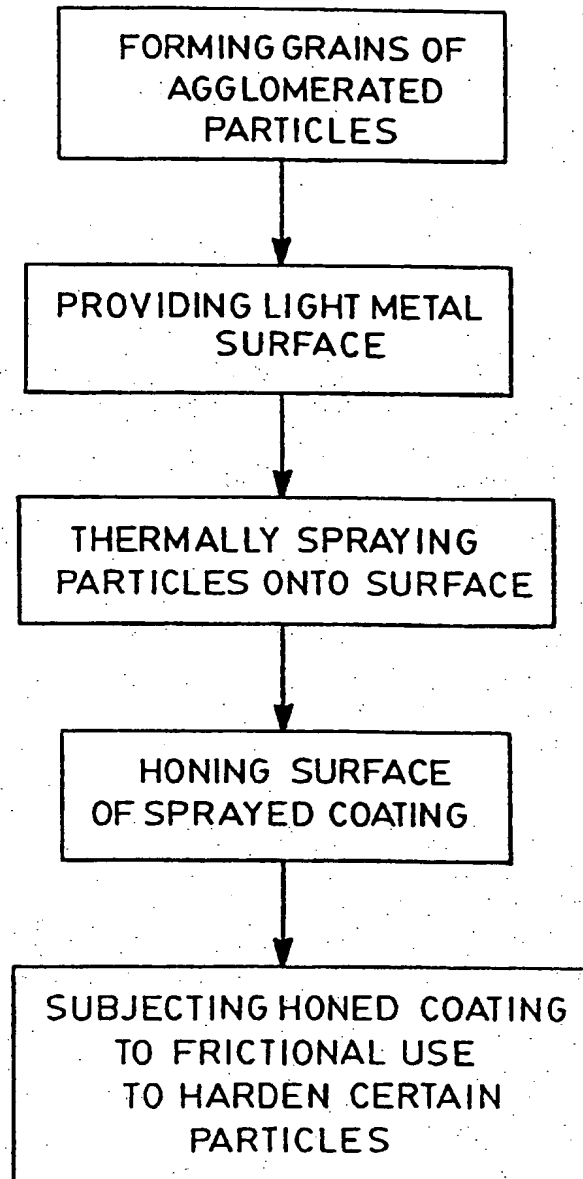


FIG-12

FIG-13

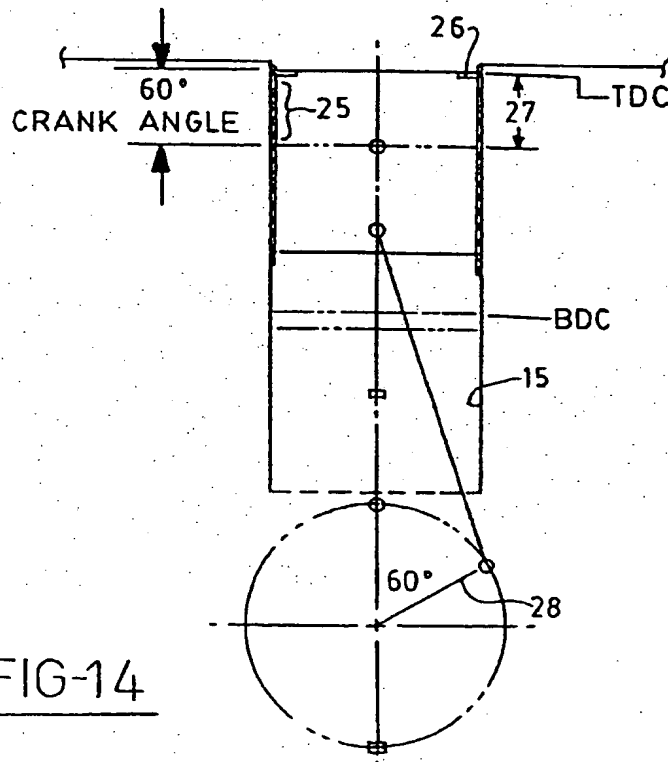
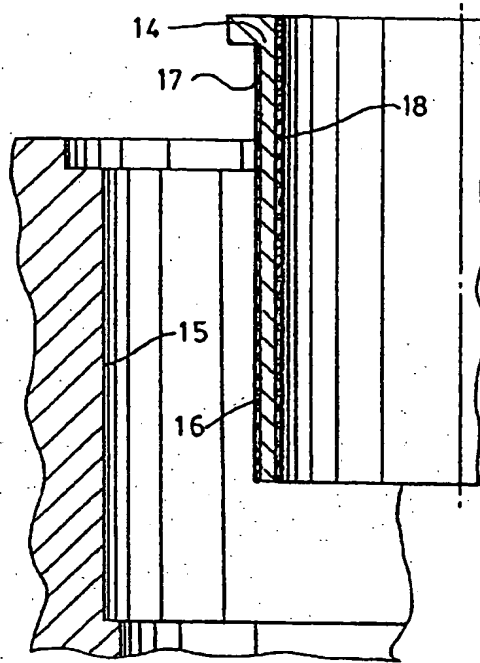
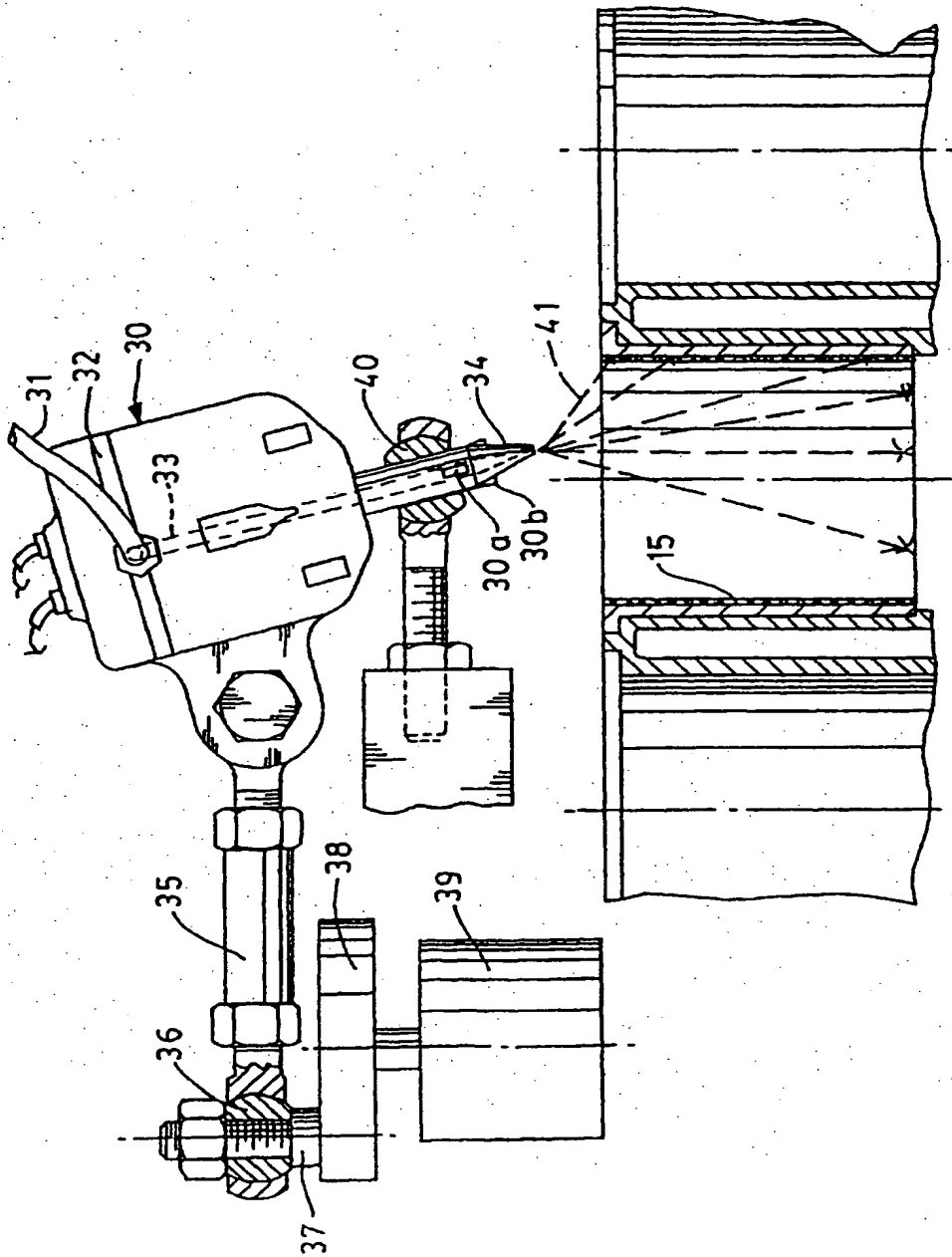


FIG-14



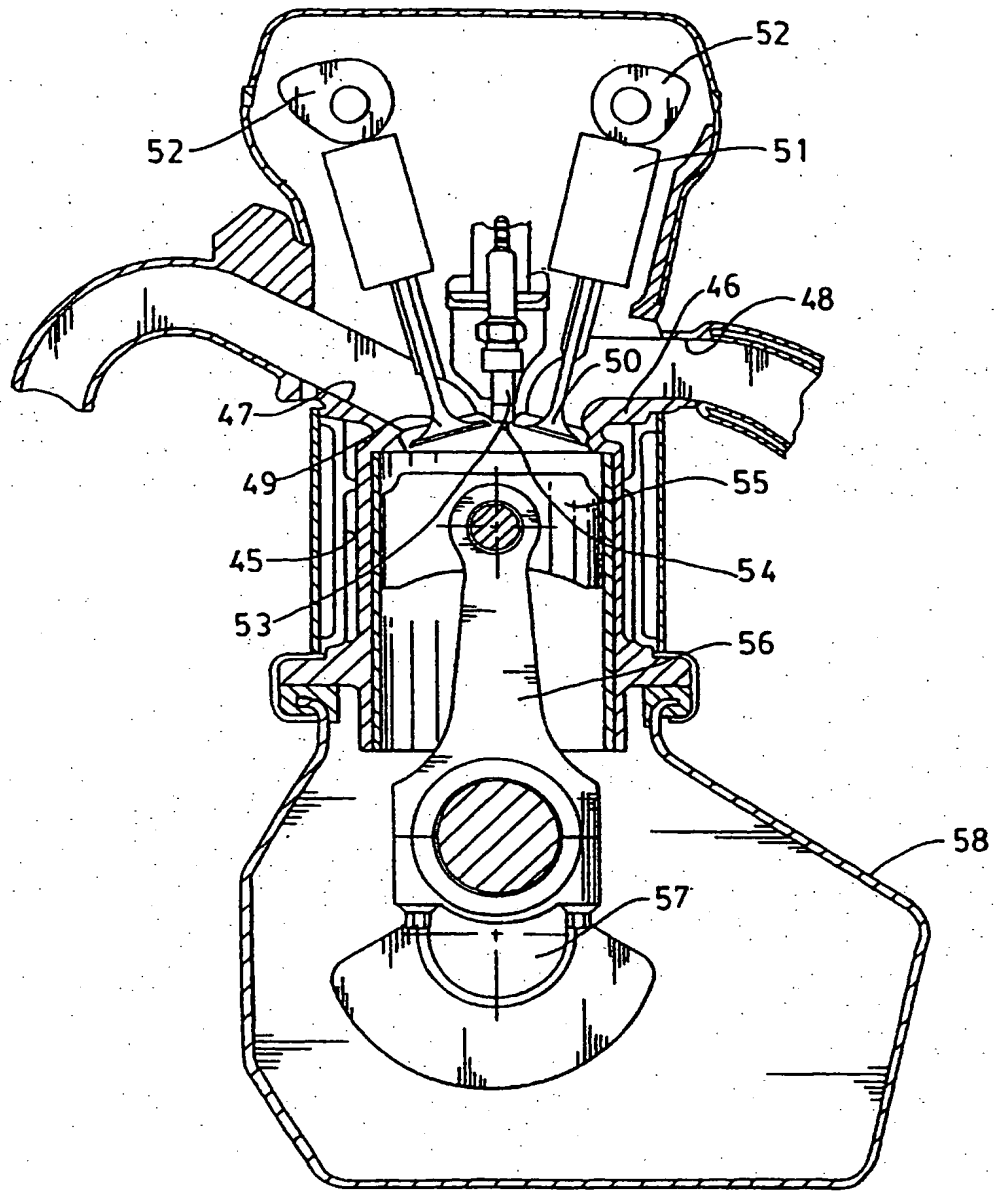


FIG-16